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A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

HINGHAM, 17 DECEMBER, 1817,

AT THE

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ORDINATION OF THE REV. DANIEL KIMBALL, A. M.

PRECEPTOR OF DERBY ACADEMY,

AS AN

EVANGELIST.

BY HENRY COLMAN,
MINISTER OF THE THIRD CHURCH IN HINGHAM.

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SERMON.

II. TIMOTHY iv. 5.

DO THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST.

In the primitive church the offices of evangelist and pastor were distinct from each other. The pastoral office implied a connexion with some particular church or portion of the christian community as its religious instructor and president; but the duties, which are now considered as appertaining to that office, such for instance as the visitation of the sick and the dying, and the particular care of the poor of the church, were performed by the deacons and elders, or, in cases relating to their own sex, by the widows and matrons.* The office of evangelist was that of a preacher of the gospel, appointed, by a solemn and impressive ceremony, to the duties of publick religious instruction and the administration of the ordinances of christianity, wherever the providence of God might open a field for these honourable labours.

* 1 Tim. v. 10.

If changes, in what may be termed the political circumstances of the church, have brought the office of evangelist, as distinct from pastor, in some degree into disuse, yet the practice of the Apostles is a sufficient sanction, wherever circumstances render its institution expedient. We judge the present to be such an occasion. We have assembled for this purpose. We presume not and we would not be thought to presume, by any thing which may be said or done at this time, to confer any spiritual power, dignity or rights; but we think it not inconsistent with the proper simplicity of christian institutions, we believe indeed, that the good order of the christian church and the community requires, that the publick recognition of a christian brother as a christian minister should be attended with services of more than ordinary solemnity; we are happy in the opportunity of congratulating each other on the accession of an auxiliary to our sacred calling; we trust that the interesting though simple services of an ordination may fix in the mind of him, who is the subject of it, a deeper sentiment of responsibility, and may with advantage recall to our recollection, my brethren in the ministry, our own vows, and the affecting charge we ourselves received on a similar occasion. It must contribute to christian charity thus publickly to pledge to each other our sympathy and fellowship; and we rejoice in every opportunity of uniting our supplications at

the throne of light and mercy for a blessing on each other's purposes and labours.

The first duty of an evangelist in the primitive times and of christian ministers at the present is that of publick preaching. I propose to offer some observations on this subject. The subject is not unsuitable to the occasion, and my remarks, I hope, will be received with that candor, which we may confidently expect from the enlightened.

An institution more favourable and conducive to the best interests of the community, to social order, to private and publick virtue than that of publick christian instruction, cannot be devised. It contributes to these purposes by rendering the subjects of religion and morals, which in the multiplicity of secular concerns would by a great part of mankind be wholly overlooked, matters of general reflection, inquiry, and concern; it is the principal means of communicating to many persons whatever knowledge they possess on these subjects; it operates as a powerful restraint upon vice by often holding it up to publick disgrace and infamy in its proper colours, and by the delineation of its hurtful and tremendous consequences in the present and the future world; and, as a powerful incentive and encouragement to virtue by the exhibition of its high motives and obligations in the light of religion; lastly, it contributes in the most efficacious manner to refine and elevate in the community the standard of moral

and religious sentiment. To all these valuable purposes it is clearly adapted; to all these valuable purposes, wherever it is enjoyed, it more or less contributes; even in its lowest form it is a considerable instrument of instruction and persuasion. We will not now inquire why it is not more efficacious than it is; we will not speak of that negligence and want of seriousness on the part of hearers, that utter unconsciousness of their own immediate and personal concern in the subject, which so often renders the best religious discourses ineffectual; nor will we remark on the defects of preachers, because it might seem invidious; but we will confine our inquiries to those circumstances of composition and delivery, which are likely to render our discourses most adapted to their proper and excellent purpose.

I. The first object of every religious discourse, the motive which should govern our conduct in all the relations of social life, should be utility. Our object in preaching should be to instruct our audience on some subject which it is important they should understand, or to persuade them to practise what it is their duty to do. This forbids us to nourish our vanity, or to make our personal success and reputation a primary object of aim or desire. This does not allow us to regard the mere discharge of a stipulated measure of duty as a principal end. This will not permit us to make our particular taste,

opinions and habits of study and reflection, or our own ease, convenience or facility of execution the ground of choice. This will not allow us indeed in the selection of a subject of discourse to acquiesce in any general notions of utility.

The preacher is not to select a particular subject of discourse because it will afford him an opportunity of displaying his talents with the most brilliancy and effect. When we give our hearers reason to suspect us of this motive, that which ought to be the effect of our preaching is certainly defeated. We ought not to be satisfied, if our object is to produce only what may pass for a sermon, even though it should pass currently enough with friends, who love to flatter us. It is much to be regretted both by ourselves and our hearers, that preaching should be in any respect a pecuniary concern, and a good man will diligently discipline his mind, lest even the slightest tinge of mercenary calculation should corrupt his performance of religious services. A preacher should not choose a subject merely because it is easy to treat it; for the effect of such indulgence, if often repeated, will be fatal to all vigour and manliness of thought; there is no apology for indolence in ministers or people; a habit of this description being fixed, the discourses become, with little variety of form and expression, but a mere repetition of the most common-place

and uninteresting remarks.* We are not to choose a subject solely because it gratifies our taste or accords with our peculiar speculations, lest we treat one, which to our hearers may be incongruous and unnecessary; perhaps worse than useless, by suggesting doubts, difficulties or perplexities, which the limited means of inquiry that some possess will not enable them to remove. We are not to choose a subject of discourse at random, only because it strikes our fancy or from the mere suggestion of some text as convenient for that purpose. Excepting those cases in which we mean to explain some particular passage in the scriptures, is it not a reasonable and good rule never to look for a text until we have decided upon a subject?—This would contribute to that unity of discourse which ought to be a first requisite; it would tend to a fuller investigation of the topick discussed and furnish a greater variety of subjects than we have by a different method. Lastly, in the choice of a subject for discourse it should not satisfy us, that it is a subject of morals and religion. Some subjects of

* Some apology may perhaps be found, if it is true, as Eachard observes, that there are very few texts of scripture that can be divided at soonest before friday night, and some there be that will never be divided but upon sunday morning, and that not very early, but either a little before they go, or in going to church.

Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy and Religion inquired into. p. 72.

theology are not proper subjects of publick preaching; and some moral duties, virtues to be practised or vices to be avoided, are not fit topicks of discourse from the pulpit and before promiscuous congregations.

Our attention should be directed to those subjects which are of general and universal application and utility. In the case of a settled minister, common sense and propriety will dictate, as far as practicable, in the choice of subjects and in his manner of treating them, a particular regard to the circumstances of his congregation; to their limited or advanced state of intellectual improvement; the general current of sentiment and feeling among them; their particular errours, deficiencies, prejudices, false maxims, improper manners or prevalent habits of vice; and this always without giving reason to suspect any direct or personal allusion to individuals among them, excepting so far as their own consciences may be faithful to their duty, and they may find themselves included in general exhibitions of character and sentiments. The discreet and faithful minister will not suffer to pass without notice, any particular and striking dispensations of providence, which occur among them, but will seize those opportunities, when the attention is more than commonly awake, and the heart peculiarly susceptible, to dispense the consolations and urge home the solemn considerations of religion. Let the chris-

tian preacher then in the choice of his subject ask himself, if it is an important subject; if it is a seasonable one; if it is one in which his audience are likely to be interested, and by which, if they are not wanting in their duty, they may certainly be edified. In the mixed assemblies which we address, it is not possible always to select a subject or treat it in a manner which is suited to all classes and grades of intellectual character and attainment; but where we statedly officiate to the same congregation, occasions will offer for every variety of subject and address. In this respect may not the character of almost any people be improved; by gradual and discreet attempts may not the standard of preaching among them be elevated; by a perspicuous and natural address may they not be brought to take an interest in the highest and most important discussions of religion and morals?

II. I proceed to remark in the second place on the style of composition, proper for public discourses. Sermons may be divided into two general classes; sermons designed either to instruct or to persuade, doctrinal or practical. These different kinds will often run into each other, and indeed they should in most cases be found united. No doctrine ought to be preached which has not a practical tendency, and rational conviction should always be made the basis of persuasion. These different kinds of discourse evidently dictate a dif-

ference of style; the one sedate and calm; the other animated, earnest and impassioned according to the importance of the subject; the one discursive, in the form of essay; the other, that of direct address. There are general characteristics, which apply to both kinds of discourse.

1. Perspicuity should be our first aim; what is the use of preaching if we are not understood? But this is no common excellence in composition, and it cannot be acquired without repeated and laborious exertions. In order to its attainment it is indispensable that we should fully possess ourselves of what we intend to say. It is impossible that we should be understood unless we understand ourselves; and those ideas and sentiments which are clearly defined in the mind, it will not be difficult to communicate intelligibly to others. The Sermons of the late venerable Dr. Barnes* and an anonymous volume of Sermons on Particular Occasions, not long since published among us and attributed to a friend of ours, are admirable examples of perspicuity. Dr. Barnes had none of the graces of composition, but his hearers were never at a loss for what he intended to say; and he had that simplicity and sincerity, which constitute the very soul of eloquence and which found their way directly to the heart. But in aiming at simplicity

* Of Scituate, Mass. He died 26 April, 1811 aged 81.

of style, we must carefully avoid all quaintness and vulgarity of expression, which are always offensive and inconsistent with the dignity of the pulpit.

The incessant use of scriptural phrases, in whole or in part, disjointed or connected, does not appear to me to be favourable to perspicuity. I have the highest reverence for the majesty, and the noble and beautiful simplicity of the scriptures. The language of them may often be directly quoted with great propriety and effect, but the indiscriminate use of it is not always to be approved. It deserves to be considered, that the language of the common translation of the scriptures is not the language of our times; that the scriptures are often highly figurative and abound with allusions to circumstances, customs, and rites, of which many hearers have but very imperfect conceptions; that the force of these allusions therefore is not always perceived; and that, when improperly applied or understood, they may convey very erroneous impressions. Thus the epistle to the Hebrews is filled with references, often misinterpreted, to the rites, sacrifices, and institutions of the Jewish economy. We may add that phrases of this kind come to the mind accompanied with a sentiment of their sanctity which leads us to assent to them without examination; and, the language of the scriptures having become very familiar, we often think we understand it when we do not, and it is frequently heard and

read without producing any distinct or vivid impression. Thus it often happens that members of our own family, for whom we entertain the highest respect and affection, may pass through the room in which we are sitting, without any distinct consciousness on our part of their entrance or departure, their manners or observations; whereas, if they were only occasional visitors, we should receive them with particular courtesy and attention. Nothing, which I have said, will be construed into a want of respect for the scriptures, but by those persons who wish to misunderstand me, and I am persuaded there are none such present. The scriptures are occasionally quoted with an aptness, elegance, force, and effect, singularly striking, but this demands more attention and judgment than are sometimes exercised.

2. Perspicuity being secured, the next object may be embellishment. Elegance of style is not inconsistent with simplicity. We should aim to convey our sentiments in a manner most likely to produce a favourable and permanent impression; and therefore when it can be done without the sacrifice of truth, we should consult the taste and gratification of our audience. Religion disdains all the artifices and tricks of oratory, but it demands the aid of true eloquence. There is an essential and inherent majesty in the truths of religion which, when presented in their simplest form, are some-

times irresistible; but their effect is then most powerful when imagination throws over them her vivid colours and they find their way to the heart by the blaze of the affections.

But eloquence perhaps must be discarded from religion, because it sometimes implies an appeal to the passions, and men must not, we are told, become enthusiasts in religion. O no! they may be concerned about their business, their pleasures, their politicks, but their religion is a matter about which they need feel no concern. They may be fired with ambition in the pursuit of wealth, learning and honour, but religion and virtue are to be contemplated and pursued without emotion. Religion must be to us a business of cold, mercenary calculation; our accounts with heaven are to be kept by a regular debit and credit; and the only objects worth living for are those in regard to which we are always to remain entirely unmoved.

My friends, one is wearied with the cry of enthusiasm and fanaticism from men who believe as little as they can, and feel still less than they believe, and with hearing perpetually in respect to those persons, whose hearts are interested in their religion, that they are under a delusion. We have lived long enough in a 'world without souls;' we should remember that we are advancing to a 'world without bodies;' and until the two great commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets

are expunged from the christian system, until the final consequences of our actions in the retribution of God cease to be objects deserving of our ambition or our dread, we need not fear to excite men to worship the Deity in spirit as well as in truth; and remembering always, that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,* we may appeal to every sentiment of love and gratitude, of desire or aversion, of hope or fear, to secure them from the ruin of vice, and to animate and urge them forward in the practice of christian virtue.

Be it then the object of the christian preacher first to convince the understanding and then to warm the heart; only let him have a care that his principles and instructions be founded in the religion from which he deduces them; that they be true, and confirmed by reason and experience; and then let him urge them home by a direct appeal to the consciences and the hearts of his hearers; from the prolifick stores of his imagination let him borrow every apposite illustration; let him cull from science and art and nature the fairest and most fragrant flowers of rhetoric; let his words be winged like the fiery arrows of heaven, that perchance urged by the same invisible hand they may rive the heart of stone, where hitherto all ordinary attempts to penetrate have been unavailing; and sometimes let

* Rom. x. 10.

him portray the mystic finger on the wall, which to the alarmed conscience will need no interpreter to declare 'thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting.'*

But one caution on this subject seems necessary, which is, that we speak in no case any but the words of 'truth and soberness.' Imagination, without reason and common sense at your side, like the glittering and fantastick exhalations of the evening, may prove a devious and treacherous guide. Beware, in respect to matters of doctrine or practice, of misrepresentation or exaggeration. Sometimes human nature is so frightfully caricatured, that we cannot recognize in it a single lineament of that glorious Creator who was pleased to make man after his own image; and doctrines and propositions are sometimes so much overstated, and the merit of particular virtues, or the deformity of particular vices so much exaggerated, that the hearers, discovering the falsehood of a part of the representation, without discrimination reject the whole. Truth and sincerity should lay at the foundation of every religious discourse. The doctrines of religion are of such unutterable moment that they admit of the boldest eloquence, but this is not inconsistent with the proper simplicity of christian truth.

* Dan. v. 27.

It may be expected, that I should say something of the proper length of a discourse. Some persons advise that you should sew up just sixteen pages even before you choose your subject, which you must be sure to fill up that your paper may not be wasted, and which you must not exceed, because that is long enough for any sermon. But a sermon may be long at five minutes, and it may be short at fifty. We need not give ourselves much concern in regard to the opinions of those persons, who, when the service is begun, are only solicitous to know when it will be done; and if it be your misfortune to have some hearers,* you must preach long enough to give them an opportunity of hearing a part of the discourse; but with respect to rules on this subject it is enough to say, preach till you have done, and have discretion to leave off when you have done. The only caution proper in the case is, that we should not undertake too much in a single discourse, but, confining our attention to some one subject, endeavour to give as full and connected a view of it as possible in a reasonable time.

III. I offer in the last place a few cursory remarks on the delivery of a discourse.

What is chiefly important in this respect is, that we should avoid all affectation, grimace, uncouth

* The sect of Eutychians. Acts xx 9.

tones, gestures, and manners, which are either ludicrous or offensive. Many publick speakers, through mere diffidence, contract habits of this description of which they themselves are wholly unconscious, and which impair or prevent the good effects of the best and otherwise most useful services. But rules of rhetorick can never make a man eloquent, and least of all does it seem proper to apply them to a preacher of christianity. Far be it from any one who holds that sacred and honourable character ever to consider himself in the light of a performer, and all attempts at display, every thing like study or form in his attitudes or gestures, is likely to excite disgust in the serious mind.

Let him come to his subject with those feelings and views which the nature of the duty, the occasion and the place should excite, and then let him dismiss all concern as to appearance or manner, excepting so far as to avoid peculiarities of speech or gesture which might divert the attention from the great object of the discourse. Only let him remember that the character, which he holds, is that of a teacher of the religion of Christ; that the subjects upon which he addresses his fellow-men are no other than doctrines revealed and duties enjoined by the Most High God; that in their final results and consequences they are as

solemn and affecting as can be conceived ; that in each and all of them, he and they, whom he addresses, have an immediate and personal concern ; and that the time is coming, when he and they who hear him must answer before God how he has spoken and how they have heard ; let him utter nothing but what he knows and feels and let him feel whatever he utters, and he must be eloquent in the best sense of the term, and will effectually contribute to the high purposes for which he ought to labour. Sincerity and disinterestedness give a charm to discourses of a moral and religious nature which nothing else can communicate ; and an opinion on the part of the audience, that the preacher is himself in earnest, that he regulates his own life and character by the principles and views which he would recommend to them, and that his own heart is warmed by the same fire which he would enkindle in theirs, will give a force and energy to his instructions and persuasions, which they can never have without it, and render discourses otherwise inferior, interesting and improving.

Such are some few leading principles and rules which seem to apply to this particular branch of ministerial duty. I trust that I have not spoken on this subject with an unbecoming freedom. I rely upon the often-experienced friendship of my

seniors and brethren to put the most candid construction upon my remarks.

We are happy, my brethren in the ministry, in being engaged in one of the most useful and honourable employments which can be exercised, that of enlightening and improving mankind. It is our province to communicate that instruction which is of all other the most important, moral and religious instruction; to inculcate principles, which are the only substantial foundation of honour and happiness in the present and the future world; to impart those consolations which only are adequate to heal the broken heart; and to assist and direct the inquisitive mind in its searches after virtue, happiness, immortality, and God. It is our province to attempt to rescue men from the debasement and wretchedness of vice; to elevate their views and disclose to them the prospects of futurity; to dwell with them upon the most interesting and glorious exhibitions of God's mercy to the world in the gift of Jesus Christ his Son; and by motives and arguments the most grand and powerful and momentous, to persuade them to the practice of virtue and to invite them to a communion and friendship with the best and holiest of beings. May our own minds be elevated by these exalted views, our own hearts glow with this divine spirit, our own lives be governed by these holy

principles, that having preached to others, we may not ourselves be rejected; in the discharge of these high duties, may we be sincere, serious, honest, zealous, disinterested, faithful, as becomes the dispensers of the best of heaven's gifts to mankind; the ministers of a religion worthy man's entire confidence, his profoundest veneration, and his purest affections; confirmed on the part of Jesus Christ by the most arduous, magnanimous, and sublime labours and sacrifices, and in its establishment, and propagation, its earlier and its later triumphs, honoured by the signal interpositions and displays of God's wisdom, power and mercy.

The candidate for ordination will accept the assurance, which we trust he does not need, of our interest in the success of his labours as a christian instructor and guide. The proprieties of the place and the occasion forbid any expression of that personal esteem and regard, which the heart would prompt, but which had better be conveyed in other language than that of words. We bid you welcome, my friend, to a share in our honourable labours and services; we rejoice in this publick recognition of you as a christian brother and minister, which custom, reason, order and propriety sanction and approve; we assure you of our earnest prayers to our common Father in heaven on your behalf; may his blessing follow you through life, and may

he grant to you that, which to the benevolent and pious mind, is the richest of all rewards this side the grave, a success to your labours in dispensing the light and consolations of the gospel, adequate to your reasonable expectations and your warmest wishes; and in the end admit you to a more glorious service among 'the just made perfect.'

To this christian assembly we tender our respectful and fraternal salutations. The success of our faithful labours rests under God's blessing with you, and this we wish, brethren, even your perfection,* and this we pray that your love for God, for Christ and for mankind, your love for christian truth and christian virtue may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.† While the serious and faithful minister gives you his best services and consecrates his labours and talents to truth, humanity, virtue and piety, chill not his ardour by neglect or indifference; do not torture and oppress him with a grief and sickness at heart, which is inexpressible, when he enters the house of God to join and to guide your devotions and to address his friends and fellow men on the most momentous subjects of human concern in God's behalf, to find himself forsaken by those whom it is his first desire to serve, and compelled

* 2 Cor. xiii. 9. † Philippians i. 9.

to spend his strength upon naked walls and vacant seats. Think not that your duty is done, when you have contributed what the laws of the land require you to contribute to his pecuniary support; I would to God that you could for one moment enter into the feelings of an honest and faithful minister, and nothing would tempt you to think of him so unjustly and to treat him so unkindly; miserable and contemptible indeed is that minister, who can suffer even for the shortest time such motives to occupy the place in his heart, which belongs only to the high considerations of religion. On the contrary animate his exertions, soothe his toils, quicken his zeal, reward his labours by 'lending to him a listening ear,' and 'an understanding heart;' by your presence and sympathy; by your cordial reception and serious and conscientious improvement of his services.

While he exhibits to you the high objects of christian ambition, and points to the path of true happiness, and opens to your faith and hopes a way of access to God's unclouded presence, press forward with a generous emulation, that you may enter with him into those regions of exalted virtue and spiritual perfection, where we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but by immediate and infallible perception;* where there is no night, and men need

* I Cor. xiii. 12.

not even the light of the sun, but the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall triumph forever and ever.* Let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life freely.†

* Rev. xxii. 5. † Id. 17.

CHARGE,

BY THE REV. DR. ALLYN, OF DUXBURY.

Ordination of ministers is justly considered a sacred and solemn act, but like other religious acts has no value in itself unless it lead to sentiments, affections and conduct which are holy, worthy of the christian, and beneficial in their effects to the church. If we separate from the solemn exercises usual on occasions like the present, the ideas suggested to the mind, the ends designed, the religious and moral tendency of the language used, nothing of value remains. Prayer and praise, the singing of psalms, the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, together with the act of ordination in which we are now engaged, have, none of them, any use, sacredness, acceptability, separate from their influence in producing a more devout, active and useful life. On this principle, ordination, without any special reference to place, or a people of the minister's charge, may be viewed with favour and approbation, if the service be performed in a serious and pious manner, accompanied with moral effect in regard to the candidate to be ordained, and in regard to the spectators and actors in this solemnity.

Ordination communicates no grace; only operating as a monitor, and drawing after it a particular train of ideas and emotions. It communicates no exclusive authority, for every man is authorized to admonish, teach and persuade his neighbour for his edification. It places a man under no obligation not binding before; for every christian is obliged to perform what may benefit his fellow-creatures, advance the cause of christianity, and promote the glory of God.

But on what basis shall we ground the charge to be given to the candidate for ordination? Here is no commencement of any new connexion; no call to stated preaching and the administration of religious ordinances; no constant engagement in the usual services of christian worship; no expectation that the duties of the pastoral relation will devolve upon him. It is answered; we, the ministers of the Bay Association charge you, Sir, to walk worthy of your vocation as a *christian*; to do the work of an evangelist as you have opportunity; to defend the gospel against the libertine and scoffer; to inculcate the tenets

and precepts of christianity in your intercourse with men; to speak and act at all times, and in all places, as a disciple of Christ.

Further, we charge you as a *protestant christian*, made free with the liberty of the gospel, ever to deem truth as more important than local orthodoxy, the scriptures as more complete than any creed of human composition; to maintain the right of each to judge for himself, to own the truths revealed to your mind, and not through fear of injury in your person or estate, to conceal it; to confess Christ and all you believe respecting him and his religion, with a due regard however to his own example when he said, I have many things to say, but ye cannot bear them now. Preach and practice on that sacred decision; I will have mercy and not sacrifice. You will consequently not injure such as may be deemed heretics, in the common, though incorrect use of the term. Our laws have not allowed us the power of injuring them in their bodies, or estates; may you never be disposed to detract from the merit of their character.

We charge you to oppose, by your constant influence, the disposition of some to separate from their pious and virtuous brethren; and let your charity towards others be as large as you desire their's to be toward yourself. Deem no man or assembly of men infallible. Respect the wise and the good, and be always watching for new light to break upon your mind and upon the world.

We charge you furthermore, as *a dissenter*, to beware of the garment having the spots of antichrist; to maintain the liberty of churches, and the right of individuals to join those churches, the sentiments of which are most congenial to their own, and the ministers of which exercise gifts most acceptable and profitable to them.

Having had the advantages of a liberal education, having been nursed in the school of our prophets, we charge you to consider an acquired ability of teaching others, a power of doing good as intimating an obligation to exert yourself in promoting religious faith, hope and charity. Use every means of perfecting your ideas of christianity. Meditate on its value, its spirit, its laws and sanctions, its doctrines, its history and examples, its influence on individual and national happiness, and that of the whole world. Reflect on its immediate and ultimate design to make men holy and virtuous, and to fit them for the enjoyments of eternal life. Seek advancement in christian knowledge. You have not now to learn the comprehensive and progressive character of religion. You was not satisfied with the imperfect ideas imbibed in the nursery. You indulged a spirit of search; and with the same reason, at this more advanced age, if humble, you will doubt of the full-

ness and perfection of your faith, and expect new discoveries from the study of the sacred scriptures, the treasury of wisdom and truth. Here on earth we see but in part; we are disciples in the christian school, and must receive the kingdom of God with the docility of children. A humble and docile temper will afford the best security against the fickleness of those who are always changing without improving. It will prevent from pertinaciously adhering to prepossessions, and obstinately refusing confession of error. It will secure against the delusion of sudden impulses and the conceit of intuitive knowledge; against superstition which, by plunging the human mind into despair, utterly paralizes its searching power. Consider yourself a learner, and not vainly imagine that your sight now extends to the whole system of divine truths, but discriminate that horizon which bounds the visible and invisible hemispheres of things known and unknown.

But while you humbly sit at the feet of Jesus Christ, yet in the presence of your brethren, and especially in the company of profane and immoral men, you may assert the character of a teacher in Israel, and use the boldness of a prophet. You will frown on the cold and lukewarm christian, on the backsliding and unstable, on the perverse disputer, on the irreligious and unbelieving who see no form or comeliness in our divine Master, that they should desire him.

Though we have no reason to suspect a particular necessity, we charge you to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and to give no place to false brethren by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel may continue with you. Enlist yourself among the reformers of your fellow-men. Oppose every kind of wickedness in all persons, whether high or low, rich or poor, whether professors of religion or not; for as in the church of God, men all meet together on the same level, asserting like privileges, so the minister of Christ knows no man after the flesh, but notices the good and the bad, wherever they may be found, by praising the one and reproving the other. Be zealous therefore as you have opportunity, to ameliorate the character and manners of all whom you can influence. I used the word *zealous*. Permit me to explain it. Zeal is only another word for charity; and charity is mainly shown by efforts to reform our fellow-men, to diminish the power of sin in the heart, to make men more holy, more virtuous and consequently more happy; and in the attainment of these ends, it suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself. This kind of zeal once vanquished the fury of superstition; prostrated idols; maintained the christian ground against the stern authority of civil magistrates who commanded the apostles to preach no more in the name of Jesus; and with it, like victories may now be won over bigotry and fanaticism and

fashionable follies; vulgar vices, and all the evil customs and dispositions of men. Zeal or charity will give success to the arguments of every christian minister, and never leave him hopeless, that God will finally prosper that cause which he approves.

In connexion with this be admonished to favour the views of those numerous benevolent institutions, preventive of vice and misery, promotive of virtue and happiness, which distinguish these latter days of the church. In the great number of them, you will make your own selection of such as you are best able and disposed to assist; and yet we may hint at some specially deserving patronage. The Peace Society—Bible Associations—the Retreat for the Insane, and the Asylum for the Dumb, have had less attention than they merit, considering the great and extensive benefit they are calculated to afford. Peace and good will to men were the words uttered by the heavenly harbinger of the Messiah. His all comprehensive charge to his disciples was, go forth unto all nations, preach the gospel. How can christians be improved or heathens instructed better than by spreading the records of our faith? This could not have been accomplished, before the invention of printing. The greatest miracles of Christ after raising the dead, were wrought on those *possessed of the devil*. Among the principal attestations to his being the Messiah, the disciples of John were directed to report to their master—the *deaf hear, the dumb speak*. We charge you, as a minister of him who went about doing good, to favour all the humble attempts to imitate him, by relieving the distressed in body and mind, and promoting general knowledge, virtue and happiness.

It may serve to increase solicitude for the children and youth under your care, if we charge you to make it your constant aim to inspire them with the benevolent affections of our religion. Represent all knowledge as of little comparative importance, if not subservient to the ends of religion, morality and usefulness; and teach them that the best proofs and effects of piety are benevolence, purity of language, submission to their superiors, diligence in study, and good conduct in life. You must suggest nothing having the smallest tendency to dissolve the tie of filial affection and submission, though some of them may have parents who say or do little to further your instruction and persuasions. You may by perseverance be successful in forming their children to such habits, and expressions of amiable goodness, as shall engage attention at home, and lead a father or mother to think when they look on their children,—almost ye persuade us to be christians.

You have been, ever since your profession of christianity, tacitly considered a member of the society of christians for the suppression of vice and advancing the reformation of manners;

but now you are specially recognized as such; for what else is the christian priesthood but a holy fraternity for these very purposes. When you are invited to subscribe your name as a member of any particular institution established for religious and moral purposes, you may say with the Quaker in his reply to the invitation to join the Peace Society, "I belong to your society already." All ministers of Christ from the very nature of their profession, should consider themselves as one body, whose joint and several duty it is to devise and execute the best means of breaking up the evil customs of the world, and promoting the interests of religion. Support designs of reformation and thus you will prevent reproach against that holy name by which we are called. You will then honour us more than we honour you when you exhibit yourself a patron of moral improvement, as well as an example of virtue.

You will occasionally be invited to preach in our pulpits, and our experience of your readiness in past time to engage in labors of love, promises a like disposition hereafter. We do not require you to preach as we do, to reiterate our creed; but rely on your discretion to display such truth as our hearers can bear, in a manner suited to their average character. We rest assured that you will display the spirit and power of christianity, together with its duties and immutable sanctions; and we shall be satisfied, when our people report to us and say, the minister you sent us was serious, plain, pointed and practical. Estimate the value and use of your preaching by its effect, and think those discourses the best, which contain the most cogent persuasions to repentance and a holy life, the hearers of which depart from the house of worship silent and thoughtful, instead of inquiring of news, giving invitations to a party, descanting on the merits of the speaker, digesting plans of business, and many other improprieties of a like kind.

The best, I had almost said the only good discourse is that, by which the sleeping conscience is awakened; the heedless sinner arrested in his progress; the wavering christian confirmed, or some kindred purpose is answered, relative to the spiritual defects of mankind. It is the opinion of some that most good may be done by our prayers. These, together with reading the scriptures, and singing psalms and hymns in honour of God and Christ, constitute the essential part of christian worship. The addition of formal discourses is of modern date, and however useful sometimes, it must be confessed, they often do little else than feed the vanity of the orator, or gratify the itching ears of his audience. Since, however, the opinions of our country and age require sermons, let them always be perspicuous, simple in language and arrangement of ideas, directed to one point, tending to produce a disposition in the hearers to

think more of themselves, and the truths dispensed, than of the gifts and graces of the dispenser.

You will sometimes meet with the sick and afflicted, though not called to attend upon them as we are. Humanity, and much more, christian love will dictate words of advice, consolation and support; to which you will add your prayers on the slightest intimation, that they are desired. All objects of distress, whether in body, mind or estate, will engage your attention, and you will never be more happily employed than in comforting the feeble minded, binding up the broken hearted, and strengthening the bruised reed.

It is desirable to have more occasional preachers; to see respectable laymen fall into the ranks of the ministry, by praying, preaching, giving a word of exhortation in cases of exigency. To reason of righteousness, temperance and a judgment to come, is not exclusively the duty of clergymen; but all christians should be preachers to their families, neighbourhood, and in the circle of their friends; while the best endowed may act in a more enlarged sphere. Were our magistrates, lawyers and physicians men of religious character, to give a word of comfort and exhortation, as did the first governor of Massachusetts Province,* would add dignity to their calling, raise the standard of public morals and religion, awaken the diligent labours of ministers to bring out of their treasury, things new and old, answering the expectations of intelligent hearers, and excite the hope, that the time is not far distant, when all, from the least to the greatest, shall know the Lord.

MR. KIMBALL'S VIEWS OF RELIGION, EXHIBITED TO THE COUNCIL.

Published by request.

THERE is a GOD all-wise, powerful, and gracious, the creator, preserver, and governour of the world, the constant inspector of our purposes and conduct: His providence extends to every creature and event; and his unity is as evident as his existence and providence.

GOD has made to man a revelation of his will: [1] To our fathers he spake by the prophets in the Old Testament; and to us he has spoken by Christ and his friends in the New Testament. These scriptures, our rule of faith and practice, are sufficiently plain and full to form and perfect the christian character.

* Vid. Col. His. Soc. 9th vol. page 19 and 10. 2 note.

[1] Heb. i. 1.

Their writers were holy men, and so far as inspiration was necessary, they were divinely inspired.

The New Testament explicitly reveals a future state of reward and punishment, adapted to the character and condition of mankind individually, the natural result of a virtuous and vicious life as well as the equitable appointment of God.

Christianity is designed to make men good in every office and condition of life. It contemplates man as capable of action and volition; it addresses the understanding and heart; and its requirements are practicable and reasonable. It inculcates supreme love to God; sacred regard to his authority; disinterested love of mankind; operative benevolence; repentance of sin; every virtuous and amiable affection and quality; and it forbids selfishness, hypocrisy, pride, malice, revenge, evil-speaking, inordinate affections, uncharitableness. But we claim not future happiness as the *reward* of our virtues. [1]"By grace we are saved." That the conditions of salvation have been granted us, and that we have power to comply with them, is owing to God's unmerited goodness. He will grant also the *aiding* influence of his spirit to those who endeavour to [2]do his will, to [3]work out their own salvation.

[4]"God made man upright." All are naturally free from moral pollution. The obliquity of our character is attributable to ourselves. We have sought out evil inventions. [5]There is "a law in the members warring against the law of the mind:" The former is passion and appetite; the latter reason and conscience. It is our duty to keep the passions checked and balanced; by their abuse only we are [5]"brought into captivity to the law of sin."

The divine mission of Christ is attested by stupendous miracles. He was [6]sanctified and sent into the world by God, from whom he derived his power, by whom he was qualified to instruct and save mankind. He was the representative, he bore the moral image of God. In affection and design he was [7]one with the Father, as his disciples were, and as all the friends of religion should be one. His benevolent and arduous labours, privations, and sufferings demand our deepest gratitude. But the doctrine of his vicarious sufferings is inconsistent with man's responsibility, and the free grace of God in his salvation.

The scripture doctrine of election relates to distinctions and privileges connected with the present state; and St. Paul's predestination relates to the calling of the gentiles to share the benefits of christianity. Unconditional election and reprobation to future happiness and misery is not a scripture doctrine. The prodigal, who becomes a humble christian, will be joyfully received to his father's house, while the righteous man and

1 Ephe. ii. 8. 2 John vii. 17. 3 Philip. ii. 12. 4 Eccle. vii. 29.
5 Rom. vii. 23. 6 John x. 36. 7 John x. 30.

christian who makes shipwreck of faith and holiness, who becomes and continues the habitual servant of sin, will be finally rejected.

The special ordinances of christianity are baptism and the Lord's supper. The design of baptism is to initiate us as members of the church of Christ: The subjects are the infant offspring of baptized parents and believing adults; the mode sprinkling or plunging at pleasure. The design of the Lord's supper is to commemorate the death of Christ, and it is the right and duty of all baptized persons of competent age and acquaintance with religion, who have not forfeited their claim by defect in morals, to partake of this ordinance.

In the christian scriptures [1] are some things yet hard to be understood; some, which are local and temporary, and in the present state of christianity have no meaning. And Christ sometimes adapted his language to the prevalent opinions of the times, without deciding upon the truth or falsehood of such opinions; for example, in regard to demoniacks.

Those only who are favoured with christianity will be judged by it. [2] "They who have not this law are a law unto themselves;" and [3] it will be more tolerable for the virtuous heathen in the day of judgment than for the vicious christian.

We should reduce our opinions to the standard of scripture, and not the scriptures to our opinions. We should adopt no established creed, by whatever authority it is sanctioned, without weighing every article in the balance of the gospel, and never consider our creed so complete, as to be inaccessible to additional light and knowledge. It is our duty to relinquish to no individual or class of men our right of private judgment, and to give to every man the right which we claim. Union of sentiment is not essential to union of affection; and as christians must differ, they should agree to differ without violating the laws of christian charity.

Genuine religion may be associated with erroneous opinions, and correct sentiments and speculations may be associated with criminal defect in religion. Faith alone cannot redeem a life of *practical* infidelity. The most important doctrines are easily understood; and God will accept virtuous purpose, persevering endeavour, and constantly advancing virtue in place of perfect rectitude.

We ought to admit the doctrines of scripture by the evidence of reason; to keep the avenues to progressive improvement open and free; to discard erroneous opinions, however honestly imbibed, or however sanctified by age; to feel and confess that we are liable to false principles and inferences; and to acknowledge the good man, to whatever religious denomination he may belong, our christian brother.

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 16. [2] Rom. ii. 14. [3] Matt. x. 15.

B.P.L. Bindery.
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